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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000983

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DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS  
DEPARTMENT PLEASE ALSO PASS TOPEC  
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06-14-14

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In meeting with Ambassador, President discusses the obstacles to peace talks with the Tigers

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 06-14-04 unclass email

- (B) Colombo 959, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.  
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a June 11 meeting with the Ambassador, President Kumaratunga expressed her appreciation for the Co-Chairs' support for the peace process and indicated her desire and difficulties in getting the Tigers back to peace negotiations. Her flexibility on the substance of the proposed discussions have not netted her any reciprocal compromise from the LTTE, who remain insistent on only discussing interim administration issues at the peace table. In the meantime, the President has publicly outlined her plans regarding the GSL's involvement in peace negotiations, including efforts to involve the body politic in the process. With the Tigers continuing to be unyielding and the latest confusion regarding the President's position on agenda items for the talks, the peace process continues to be shaky and it is not apparent from where a fresh idea for restarting talks will emerge. END SUMMARY.

President: Ready to talk with Tigers  
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2. (C) On the morning of June 11, the Ambassador was unexpectedly called to see President Chandrika Kumaratunga later that afternoon. As the meeting started, it became evident that the President had responded to the Ambassador's meeting request of several days earlier to brief her on the Co-Chairs June 1 meeting in Brussels and subsequent press statement. (At the beginning of the meeting, a tired-looking President said she was departing on June 13 on a personal trip to London; news reports have indicated she is attending daughter Yasodhara's medical school graduation.) Thanking the President for seeing him when she was clearly busy, the Ambassador said Deputy Secretary Armitage had personally underscored the sense of urgency the Co-Chairs felt. All parties in Sri Lanka had to work on resuming peace negotiations. Although the international community was vested in a political solution to the GSL's conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Ambassador said that other world issues would compete for donors' attention and financial aid, especially if Sri Lanka's peace process continued to drift.

3. (C) On one point, however, the Ambassador said there should be no question of the international community's support -- that all were committed to ensuring the sovereignty of Sri Lanka throughout the peace process. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, also present at the meeting, shared a letter from Chris Patten, EU Commissioner of External Relations, which further emphasized the Co-Chairs' support for Sri Lankan sovereignty.

4. (C) The President responded that she was appreciative of the Co-Chairs' message of encouragement. She concurred with the need to resume peace talks with the LTTE as soon as possible and felt there was still hope for progress, despite the remaining differences between the two sides. Both sides were ready to talk. The Norwegian facilitators were insistent on having an established agenda to frame the discussions, and that the two sides needed to agree on a public statement. The President stated, however, that in several drafts of a statement, the Norwegians had reflected mostly the LTTE's position, without sufficiently taking GSL issues into account.

5. (C) She specifically highlighted the Tigers' position to only discuss an interim administration -- on the basis of their Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal -- with talks on final issues to follow subsequently. Detailing the evolution of her thinking,

the President said that she would be willing to soften the GSL's stance that interim and final issues be discussed in parallel, if the LTTE agreed to start final talks as a mutually approved interim arrangement was being implemented. In response, she said, the LTTE would only commit to discussing final issues after an interim arrangement was "operational." The President was not receptive to this idea.

16. (C) Separately, the President described her June 10 evening meeting with 20 MPs from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), calling the politicians "sincere" in their commitment to the peace process. (See below for the TNA readout of the meeting.) She said the group assured her that the LTTE would not seek a separate state, if they were granted an interim administration for the north/east. The MPs also felt that it was within her power to change the constitution to facilitate a permanent solution to the conflict. The President said she replied that her power was from the people and she had to include them in the process.

#### Tamil Politicians Upbeat after Presidential Meeting

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17. (C) Following the June 10 meeting with the President -- the group's first private meeting with her in over two years -- the Tamil MPs declared that the President had agreed to the LTTE's stance that the ISGA would be the basis for talks. The same day, pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" reported that the President agreed to discuss "core issues after the conclusion of talks on the ISGA." Separately, one TNA MP told POL FSN that the President would commence talks in August, based on the LTTE's ISGA proposal.

18. (C) The President did not agree with the TNA's version of the June 10 meeting. She expressed frustration when recounting early June 11 comments made by R. Sampanthan, a senior TNA MP, who told the press the President had agreed to discuss the ISGA, set up an interim administration and then talk about final issues.

#### Presidential Address

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19. (C) In her first major address since the April 2 parliamentary elections that brought her United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) to power, the President delivered a televised speech to the nation on the evening of June 12. The wide-ranging speech outlined key policy initiatives on the economic and political matters, including the peace process. Highlights of the speech (Ref A), as related to the peace process follow:

-- "The two parties (GSL and LTTE) are still working out what the next round of peace negotiations should be about," referring to the LTTE's desire to focus on interim administration only while the government wished to also engage in discussions on a permanent solution.

-- "As a responsible Government, we take very seriously the urgent need to undertake effective development work in the North & East, and are willing to explore with the LTTE interim political measures that can address this need...with the sovereignty...of the country."

-- The creation of a "broad-based national forum -- the National Advisory Council on Peace and Reconciliation -- that will provide a mean for the people of the country to contribute to a political settlement and work towards reconciliation."

-- The establishment of a "continuing dialogue with all the political leaders of the various communities and groups represented in Parliament...parallel to talks between the GSL and the LTTE." The dialogue is intended to keep the country informed of progress of talks with the LTTE and to convey to the LTTE the views of all concerned parties. (The President had also expressed her intent to the Ambassador to convene the political parties for such a dialogue.)

-- "A negotiating team will be nominated from among senior Cabinet Ministers, after dates for talks are agreed upon."

110. (C) On June 13, TamilNet carried reports of a negative LTTE reaction to the President's speech, accusing her of "linking the ISGA with a permanent political solution." The report also characterized the President's desire to discuss "core issues" in parallel to interim administration talks as a new condition.

#### COMMENT

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11. (C) The President, while strongly committed to resuming peace negotiations with the LTTE, appears to be wavering in her approach to negotiations. She seems torn between appeasing the Tigers (and their wishes) to get them to the peace table and listening to members of her party, especially Foreign Minister Kadirgamar, who strongly advocates a Tiger commitment to final talks sooner rather than later. It is not clear how this latest clash occurred, whether she actually told the TNA, "ISGA only in initial talks" on June 10 or whether they misunderstood her intent. On the southern front, the President will also have to focus energy on the increasingly negative comments on the peace process by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the major alliance partner in her minority government, who publicly oppose any discussion with the LTTE based on the ISGA. In recent talks with the Ambassador, both the President and Foreign Minister recognize the need for an alternative option to get the Tigers back to the peace table, but so far, no fresh ideas have been forthcoming.

12. (C) COMMENT Continued: Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar told Ambassador June 14 that the situation was "confusing and discouraging." Brattskar said he would travel to Kilinochchi on June 16 for discussions with LTTE leadership, and meet with the Co-Chairs on June 17 before heading to New Delhi where Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Helgesen will be visiting. END COMMENT.

13. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD